



Washington State 2016 Student Travel Survey State Report

Washington State Department of Health
Office of Healthy Communities

Washington State Department of Transportation
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Executive Summary

Each school day, nearly 1.1 million students in Washington State travel to and from school. The three main modes of travel include school bus, private vehicle and active transportation (walking, biking, skateboarding, etc.).

Busing remains the safest mode of travel for students. It is also costly – the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction reports that the cost of student transportation/school bus services for 2015-16 was more than \$421 million. Private vehicles add to roadway congestion (an estimated 10 to 14 percent of all vehicles during morning peak hours) and contribute to greenhouse gases from vehicle emissions. Walking and biking to school is inexpensive and a way for children to increase their level of physical activity. Currently, approximately 42 percent of 6th grade students do not meet national recommendations of 60 minutes of physical activity on five or more days of the week, and about 12 percent of Washington 10th graders are obese.

Unfortunately, children who walk or bike to school are vulnerable to collisions with other road users. In 2015, 654 school-aged children and adolescents (i.e., persons 4 to 18 years old) were involved in a crash on Washington roads. That involved 263 children biking and 391 children walking. Sadly, these crashes resulted in six fatalities and 66 serious injuries.

National reports indicate that most children are driven and that mode choice has changed dramatically over the years. Concerns about childhood obesity, traffic congestion and safety around our schools are common. Student use of school bus services are tracked but little is known about student choice of other modes and parent attitudes regarding the trip to school. This survey fills the gap and provides information to help make investment decisions to provide safe and equitable student transportation services that provide mode choice options and minimize traffic congestion. It identifies how students in kindergarten through 8th grades travel to and from school, and specific barriers to walking, biking or riding the bus. Results are based on phone interviews with over 11,000 parents and guardians of students from more than 200 schools across Washington State.

Key findings

2016 in Washington State:

- Walking was the most common means of transportation to school for children that live within 1 mile of school.
- Overall 41.8% of children used the school bus, 17.0% walked, 1.4% biked and 38.4% rode in a private vehicle, to travel from home to school.
- Between 2014 and 2016 there was a significant increase in the percent of children walking (16.4% increase) and biking (56% increase) to school.
- A greater percentage of students from lower income schools (17.4%) than from higher-income schools (14.9%) reportedly walked from home to school.
- A greater percentage of students living in urban areas (18.2%), compared to rural areas (11.2%), walked from home to school.

- A greater percentage of students in rural areas (49.8%), compared with urban areas (41.3%), rode the school bus from home to school.
- Parents reported safe road crossings and vehicle speed more often than the lack of sidewalks, bullying and crime as reasons why their children did not walk to school.
- Parents prioritized vehicle speed and safe road crossings over bullying and crime or ability to ride a bike as reasons why their children did not bike to school.
- Parents report that a lack of available bus services is the top reason why their children did not ride the school bus.

Washington State comparison with national data from 2014:

- A greater percentage of students in Washington State in 2014 rode the school bus (44.3%) compared to national estimates (29.8%) from 2014, to travel from home to school.
- A smaller proportion of children in Washington State (38.3%) traveled to school by a private vehicle compared with national estimates (51.5%).

Take away

Higher rates of children riding the school bus and lower rates of students being driven to school by private vehicles in Washington State compared to other parts of the country indicate that our investments in transportation services are well used. Data from the 2016 Student Travel Survey provides important benchmark information about the state's walking, biking and school bus ridership trends. The results reveal opportunities to do more to provide better, more efficient transportation options for walking, biking or riding the school bus. There are large numbers of children that live within 1 mile of school who do not use active transportation and others who live further away that could ride the school bus but don't. Parent attitudes suggest that pedestrian crossing improvements and efforts to reduce the speed of traffic near schools would influence their decision to allow their children to walk or bike to school. Reports that school bus services are not available indicate a potential to increase school bus ridership by enhancing communication and/or providing additional services in some areas. The challenge is to provide options for the best, most cost efficient transportation system possible while keeping the health and well-being of children in mind. This survey gives direction to overcome the barriers and achieve our goal.

Background

Each school day, almost 1.1 million students across Washington State travel to and from their elementary, middle, and high school. This represents about 15% of the state's population. The three main modes of travel to and from school include bus (school bus or public transit), private vehicle and active transport (walking, biking, or other form). National reports indicate student transportation patterns have changed dramatically over the last 47 years. In 1969, 48% of K–8th grade students walked or biked to school and about 38% rode the school bus nationwide. In 2014, the national estimate for students walking and biking was 17%, 29.8% rode the school bus and 51.5% of children rode in a private

vehicle.¹ While 1969 data for Washington state student travel is not available, it is reasonable to assume that state trends were similar to national trends.

Riding the school bus remains the safest mode of transportation for student travel to or from school. It is a valued transportation option, especially for families that live more than one mile from school. Washington State has made great strides in improving bus rider safety and leads the nation in school bus programming. However, busing is costly. Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) operational data reports show the cost of student transportation for the 2015-2016 school year was over \$421 million; the majority of this is for fuel and maintenance to school buses.

While a reportedly more convenient option, private vehicles used to transport students to and from school increase the number of vehicles on the road, resulting in an estimated 10-14% of morning traffic congestion.² What is more, vehicle emissions increase atmospheric greenhouse gases, substances shown to contribute to climate change. In Washington State, an estimated 46% of greenhouse emissions are attributed to transportation sources alone.

Walking and biking to school is inexpensive and a way for children to achieve recommended levels of physical activity. Increased physical activity is associated with obesity prevention. It is also associated with a reduction in chronic diseases and behavior problems, and improvements in readiness to learn and academic achievement. In Washington State, data from the Washington State Department of Health's 2016 Healthy Youth Survey show that approximately 42% of students in 6th grade are not meeting national recommendations of participating in 60 minutes of physical activity on 5 or more days of the week. Additionally, about 12% of Washington students (10th graders) are obese.

Most pedestrians and bicyclists arrive at their destination without harm. However, it is important to keep in mind that children who walk and bike can be vulnerable to collisions with other road users. In 2015, 654 school-aged children and adolescents (i.e., persons 4 to 18 years old) were involved in a crash on Washington State roads. That included 263 children biking and 391 children walking. Sadly, 72 of these crashes resulted in a fatal (6) or serious (66) injury. Preliminary results from 2016 indicate that crashes involving children walking and biking are not going down. Washington State is committed to reducing fatal and serious traffic injuries and has adopted the [2016 Target Zero Safety Plan](#) with a goal of zero fatal and serious injury traffic collisions by 2030. This report will provide information for targeted interventions that will help to achieve that goal.

¹ National Center for Safe Routes to School. (October 2016). *Trends in Walking and Bicycling to School from 2007 to 2014*. Retrieved from http://saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/SurveyTrends_2007-14_FINAL.pdf

² McDonald NC, Brown AL, Marchetti LM, Pedroso MS. U.S. school travel, 2009 an assessment of trends. *Am J Prev Med* 2011 Aug; 41(2):146-51.

Improving children’s safety while walking or bicycling: The Safe Routes to School Program in Washington State

The Washington State Safe Routes to School Program provides funding for local agencies to improve walking and biking conditions near schools. The goal of the program is to increase the number of children walking and biking to school safely.

The program provides technical assistance and funding to cities, counties, schools, and school districts for projects aimed at improving conditions for children to walk or bike to school safely, reducing congestion around schools, and improving air quality. Since 2006, Washington State has funded approximately 182 projects directly connected to 306 schools throughout the state.

2016 Washington State Student Travel Survey

The survey provides information about how students travel to and from school and the barriers to walking, biking, and riding the school bus. Funded by the State Legislature and through partnerships between the Washington State Department of Transportation, Department of Health and Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction, it provides information to help improve the safety and efficiency of student transportation services in Washington. It builds on the baseline estimate results from the [2014 Student Travel Survey](#).

Methods

Survey

The 2016 Student Travel Survey included a larger sample size of both schools and parents to allow for more robust and representative estimates. The Washington State Institutional Review Board reviewed the survey methodology and deemed all activities exempt from review. Schools were recruited for participation in the survey from February through April 2016. In February 2016 the Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI) sent a memo to all school district superintendents informing them about the administration of the upcoming Washington State Student Travel Survey (Appendix A). Following this memo, the Department of Health sent personalized emails to superintendents of districts with schools selected to participate in the Survey. This included 180 schools that had received Department of Transportation funding for infrastructure improvements from 2006—2014 (“SRTS Schools”) and 250 schools selected at random. Schools were randomly selected proportional to size, to allow for better, more accurate representation of the student population across the state.

The emails sent by the Department of Health provided background of the Student Travel Survey and a list of schools in the district selected to participate. School district/school participation in the Survey was voluntary. Follow-up phone calls/emails were provided as needed.

By April 15, 2016, of the 330 schools invited to participate in the survey (Figure 2) 242 schools agreed to participate (Table 1). These schools represent 26 counties of Washington State (Table 1, Figure 1). Some schools chose not to participate in the survey. The top reasons for schools or districts not wishing to participate in the 2016 Survey were: concern over too many competing surveys in the spring; concern over conflicts with state testing in the spring; and amount of time needed for the records release

process. The 2016 Survey included eight new counties that did not participate in the 2014 survey: Asotin County, Benton County, Franklin County, Lincoln County, Mason County, Okanogan County, Thurston County, and Whatcom County (Table 1).

Once districts agreed to participate, they received information to share with parents and staff, including a Frequently Asked Questions document and phone number to call for questions, comments, concerns, or to opt out of taking the survey. This phone number was monitored by the Department of Health, and all communications to parents – both written and oral -- were provided in both English and Spanish. Districts provided the Department of Health phone number lists of parents/guardians or primary caregivers for all enrolled students in grades K–8th in their schools, via a secure portal maintained by the Department of Health. No personal information was shared. Records release forms and data sharing agreements were completed by the Department of Health when requested.

Table 1. Schools and school districts participating in the 2016 Washington State Student Travel Survey, by county.

Counties	Number of participating School Districts	Number of participating Schools in District
Asotin	1	2
Benton	1	4
Chelan	4	8
Cowlitz	3	9
Ferry	1	2
Franklin	1	4
Garfield	1	1
Grant	3	8
Grays Harbor	2	3
Jefferson	2	3
King	9	69
Kitsap	4	8
Lewis	1	6
Lincoln	1	1
Mason	1	3
Okanogan	2	2
Pierce	5	29
Skagit	3	8
Snohomish	3	12
Spokane	7	32
Thurston	1	2
Walla Walla	1	4
Whatcom	6	11
Whitman	1	1
Yakima	5	10
Total: 26 Counties	69	242

Figure 1. Map of schools participating in the 2016 Washington State Student Travel Survey, by county.

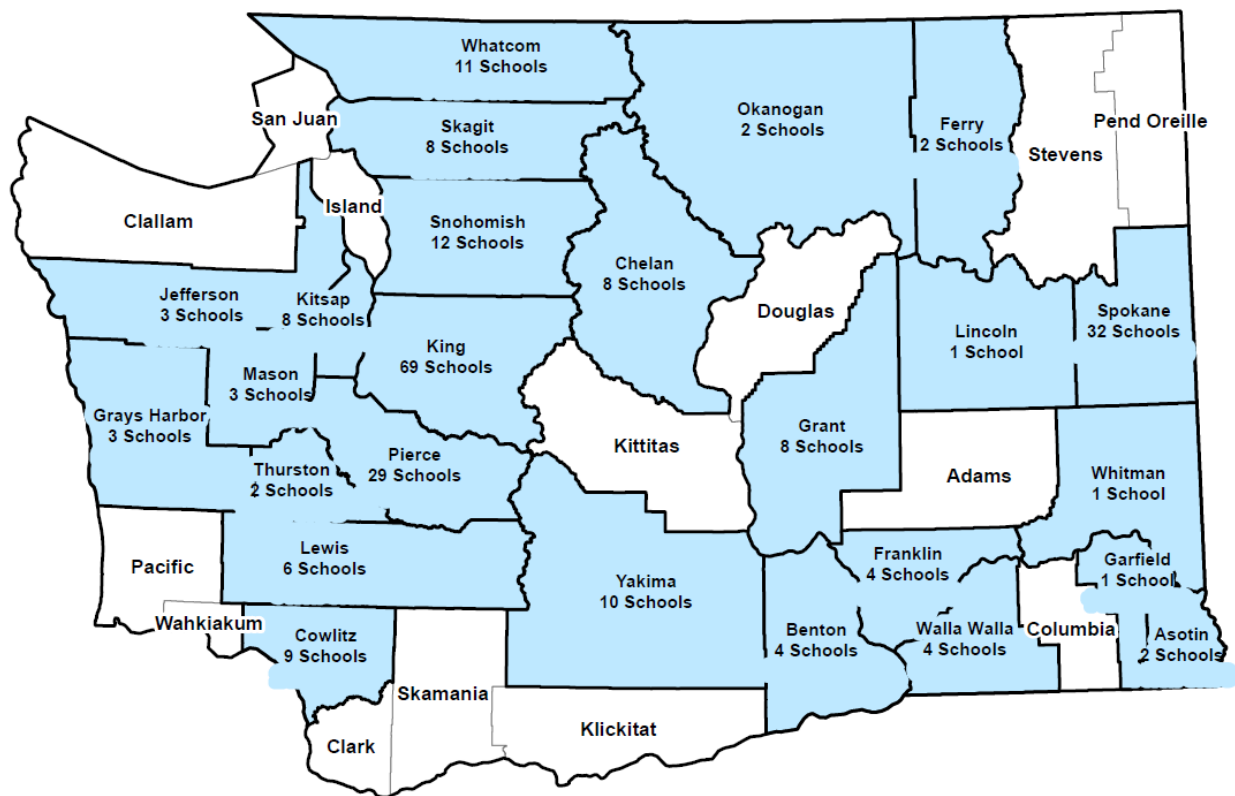
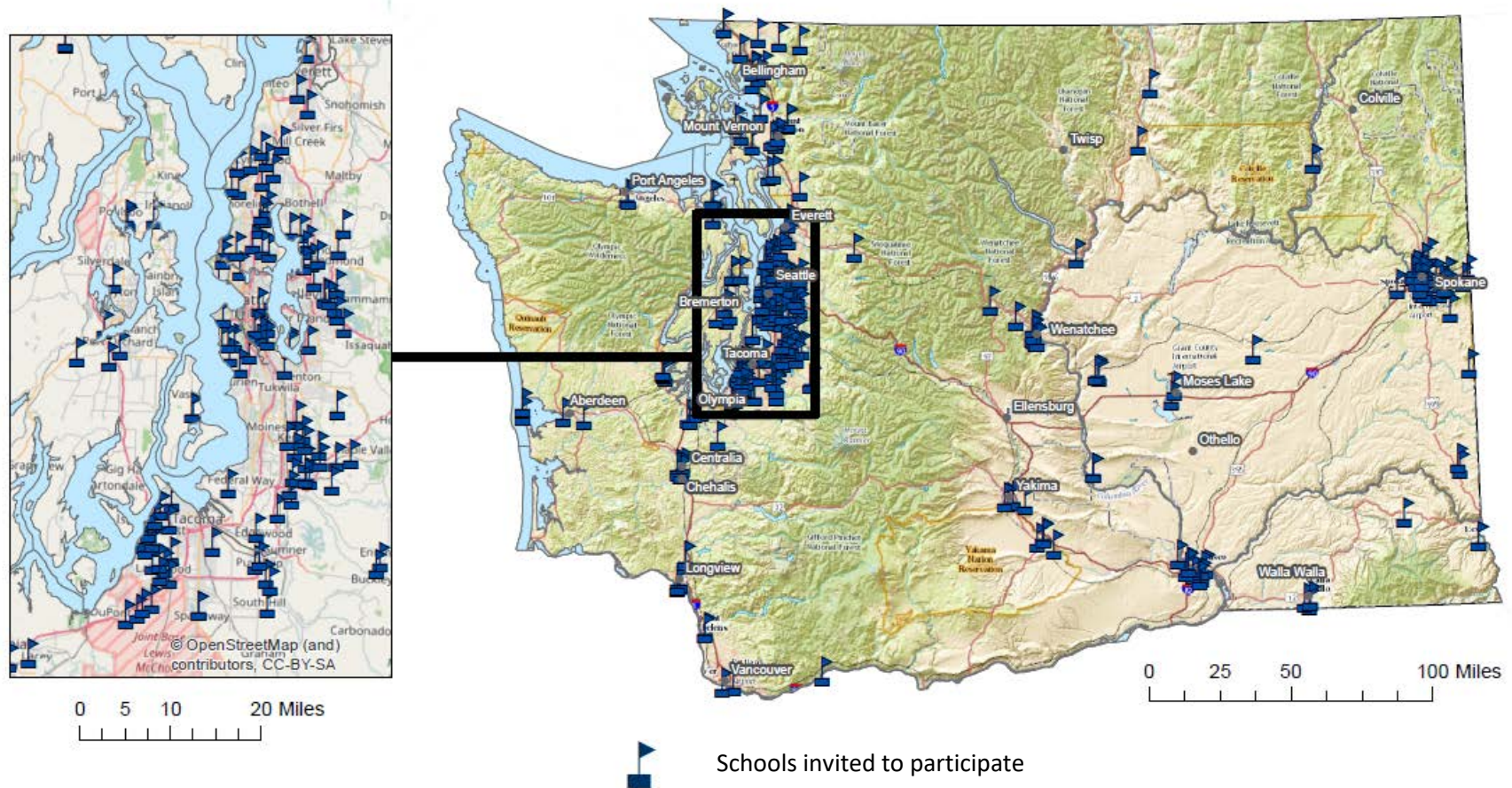


Figure 2. Schools invited to participate in the 2016 Washington State Student Travel Survey.



The Survey was conducted from April through June 2016. Phone numbers were randomly selected by grade from participating schools, and trained interviewers – contracted through ICF Macro, an outside organization with extensive experience in administering telephone surveys – contacted parents/caregivers and administered the survey by telephone. The survey was conducted in both English and Spanish. All interviewers followed a series of screening questions and confirmed that the respondent was a parent or primary caregiver of a child in the selected school, as well as the grade of the child.

Parents had the option to not participate or end the survey at any point and were informed that all participation was voluntary. Of the 45,381 parents contacted for participation in the survey, 11,421 (25%) completed the survey. The top reasons for parents not participating in the survey were related to telephone issues: for 31% the only answer was from an answering machine; for 19%, there was no answer at all; and for 5%, it was a wrong number provided by the school.

Survey questions followed those of the 2014 Survey, which was based on the Safe Routes to School National Center Parent Survey. Parents were asked to identify approximately how far their child lived from school; the mode of transportation used most days to travel from home to school; the mode of transportation used most days to travel from school to home; potential reasons why the child did not walk, bike or take the school bus to or from school, as applicable; and their perspective of whether schools supported active transportation (i.e., walking or biking) to or from school. The Survey questions can be found in Appendix B. Overall, the survey took about 6 to 8 minutes to complete.

Survey responses were analyzed using SAS version 9.4, accounting for the sampling design. All responses are presented as percentages (\pm standard error, SE). Responses were linked to population-level characteristics, where applicable, using different statewide survey sets, including the American Community Survey and demographic data from OSPI. We also present results from the 2014 Student Travel Survey, where relevant.

Variables used in this report

We created several variables for use in this report. We classified respondents as living in a rural or urban area according to their ZIP code and conventional classification systems for rural or urban status. We utilized several school-level variables obtained from OSPI public databases for comparisons of responses. We considered relative income according to the percentage of students in each school who received free or reduced price lunches, and considered higher income schools as those below the state average (<44%) and lower income schools as those at or above the state average ($\geq 44\%$). We considered race/ethnicity by categorizing the percentage of non-white students in each school and considered more diverse schools as those above the state average ($\geq 43.9\%$) and less diverse schools as those below the state average (<43.9%).

Respondent characteristics

Overall, 11,421 parents responded to the telephone survey and provided information on how their child travels to and from school. This represents 4,390 students in grades kindergarten through 2nd, 3,844 students in grades 3rd through 5th, and 3,187 students in grades 6th through 8th. There were slightly

more responses representing boys than those representing girls ($52.1 \pm 0.5\%$ boys vs. $47.9 \pm 0.5\%$ girls). This is comparable to state estimates of overall school enrollment, at 51.6% boys and 48.4% girls.

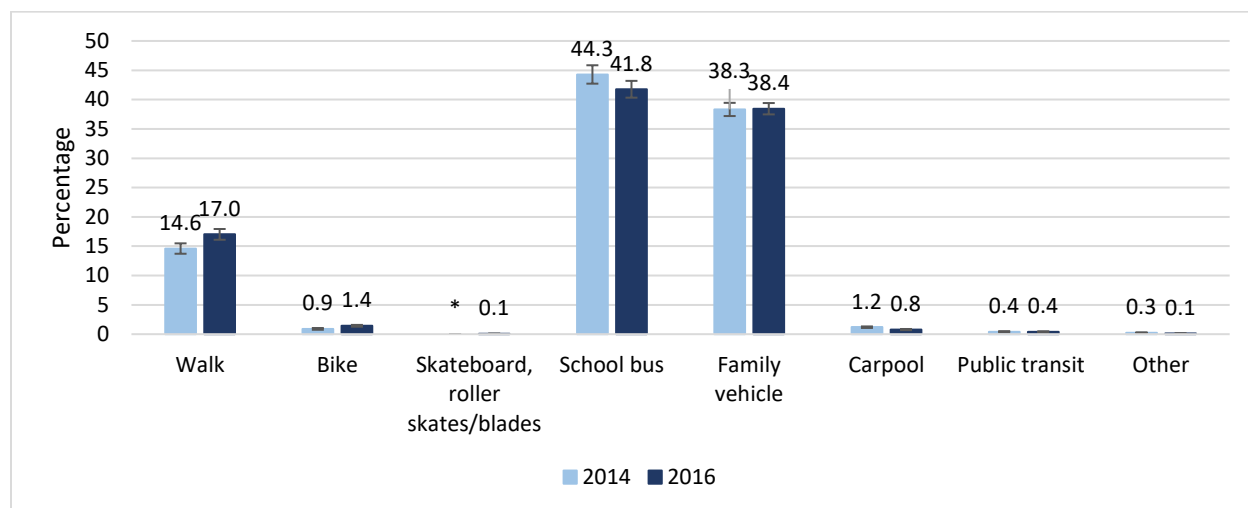
In total, 74.4% of respondents lived in an urban area, compared with 25.6% who lived in a non-urban area. Schools with parents participating in the survey had an average free/reduced price lunch percentage of 51.5%, slightly higher than the state average of 44.0%.

Results

How students in Washington State travel to or from school

In 2016, 41.8% of children rode the school bus, 17.0% walked, 1.4% biked and 38.4% rode in a private vehicle, to travel from home to school (Figure 3, Table 2). Altogether, parents reported that 18.4% of children used active transportation (i.e., walking or biking) to travel from home to school. A similar percentage used active transportation to travel from school to home (Table 2). The most frequently cited mode of transportation to travel either from home to school or from school to home was the school bus, followed by the family vehicle, walking, and biking (Table 2). The remainder of this report will focus on these four main modes of travel, and on travel from home to school.

Figure 3. Method of child’s transportation from home to school, in 2014 and 2016, according to Student Travel Survey respondents.



*Data suppressed due to low response numbers.

Table 2. Mode of child's transportation from home to school and from school to home, in 2014 and 2016, according to Student Travel Survey respondents.

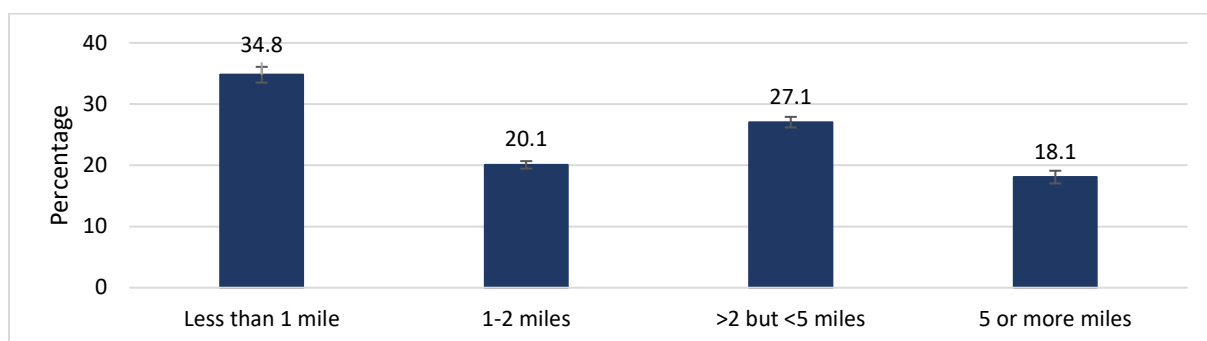
Method of travel	2016 (n=11,065)		2014 (n=9,321)	
	N	Percent (SE)	n	Percent (SE)
School bus				
To school	4621	41.8 (1.4)	4128	44.3 (1.6)
From school	4909	47.4 (1.5)	4383	49.8 (1.7)
Family vehicle				
To school	4254	38.4 (1.0)	3572	38.3 (1.1)
From school	3116	30.1 (0.9)	2636	30.0 (1.1)
Walk				
To school	1883	17.0 (0.9)	1361	14.6 (0.9)
From school	2071	20.0 (1.0)	1557	17.7 (1.0)
Bike				
To school	158	1.4 (0.2)	84	0.9 (0.2)
From school	136	1.3 (0.2)	73	0.8 (0.1)

Children who live within one mile of school are more likely to walk or bike

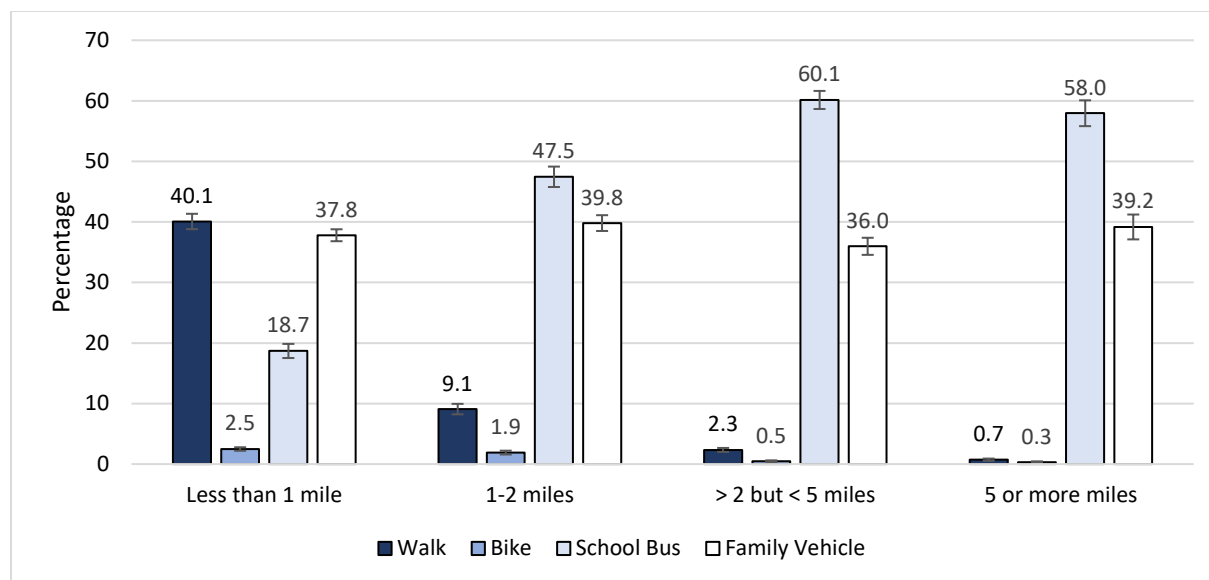
Over one-third (34.8%) of Student Travel Survey respondents lived within one mile of the school that their child attended (Figure 4A). More than half of respondents (54.9%) lived within 2 miles (Figure 4A). Percentages of children who walked (40.1%) or biked (2.5%) from home to school were higher for children living within one mile of school than for those living a mile or more from school (Figure 4B). When restricted to only those respondents who lived within one mile of school, walking was the most common form of transportation. Approximately 19% of these parents reported their child rode the school bus to school, and 38% responded their child traveled by family vehicle to school. Most school districts in Washington State limit school bus transportation for children who live within one mile of school. One mile or less is considered a reasonable distance to expect most children to be able to walk or bike.

Figure 4. Distance that child lives from school (A) and mode of travel (B) among 2016 Washington State Student Travel Survey respondents.

A.



B.



Differences in the percentage of children who walk or bike from home to school, 2014 to 2016

In the 2014 survey, parents reported 14.6% of children walked and 0.9% of children biked to school. Results from 2016 showed significantly higher percentages of children walking and biking from home to school than in 2014– up 2.4% points ($p=0.1$) and 0.5% percentage points ($p<0.5$), respectively. These reflects 16.4% increase for walking and a 56% increase for biking to school. About the same percentage of parents in 2016 as in 2014 reported that their child traveled from home to school by school bus or family vehicle.

Socio-demographic factors and mode of transport from home to school

We noticed differences in the mode of travel from home to school, according to different child and school characteristics (Table 3 and Figures 5-9). More students in grades 3 – 5 reported walking from home to school, compared with students in kindergarten – 2nd (17.7% vs. 16.5%). Compared with the youngest grade group, a greater percentage of respondents with children in 3rd – 5th grade and 6th – 8th grades reported their child biked from home to school (2.1% and 1.6%, respectively, vs. 0.6% for children in kindergarten – 2nd grade).

Overall, as grade increased, the percentage of students who were driven by family vehicle from home to school decreased. Compared with older grade groups, a greater percentage of respondents with children in kindergarten – 2nd grade reported their child traveled from home to school via family vehicle (41.9%, vs. 36.1% and 32.2%, for children in grades 3 – 5 and 6 – 8, respectively). Conversely, a greater percentage of respondents with children in 6th – 8th grades reported the school bus was the mode of travel for their child (49.0%), compared with children in grades kindergarten – 2nd and 3rd – 5th (40.0%

and 43.1%, respectively). In general, as grade increased, the percentage of students who reportedly traveled either to or from school by school bus increased (Figure 5).

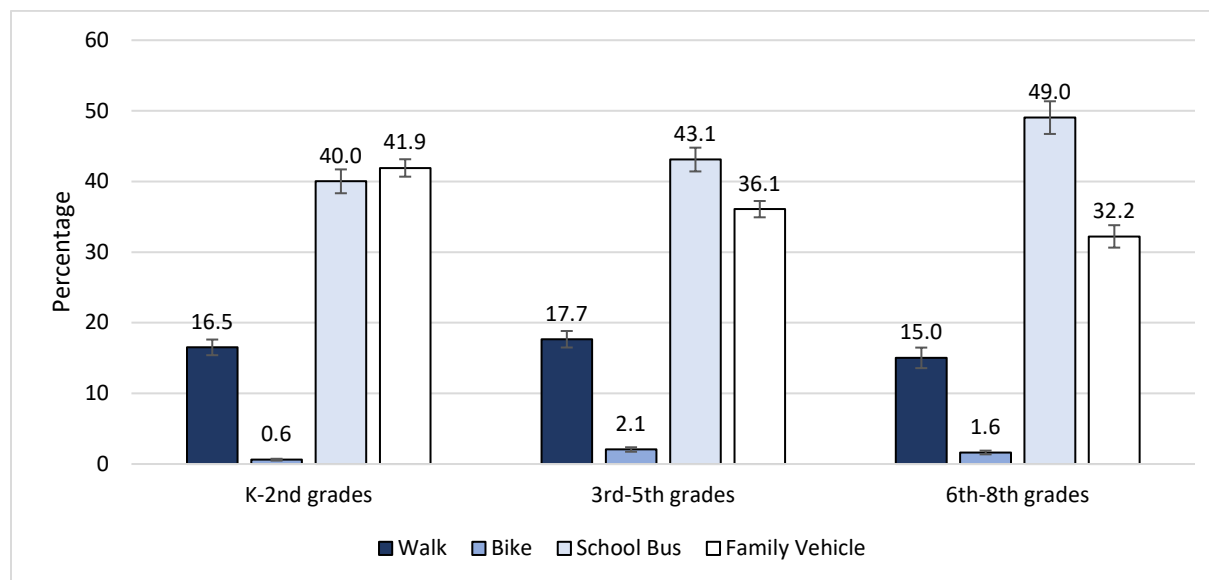
Table 3. Percentage of children walking, biking, riding the school bus, or taking a family vehicle to travel from home to school, by child and school characteristics, according to respondents in the 2016 Washington State Student Travel Survey.

	Method of travel from home to school (n, percent (SE))			
	Walk	Bike	School bus	Family vehicle
Child characteristics				
Grade				
K – 2 nd grade	725, 16.5% (1.1)	27, 0.6% (0.1)	1757, 40.0% (1.7)	1840, 41.9% (1.2)
3 rd – 5 th grade	679, 17.7% (1.2)	79, 2.1% (0.3)	1657, 43.1% (1.7)	1387, 36.1% (1.2)
6 th – 8 th grade	479, 15.0% (1.5)	52, 1.6% (0.3)	1563, 49.0% (2.3)	1027, 32.2% (1.6)
Boys	984, 16.8% (0.9)	100, 1.7% (0.2)	2594, 44.3% (1.5)	2105, 35.9% (1.0)
Girls	881, 16.3% (1.0)	57, 1.1% (0.2)	2307, 42.8% (1.5)	2076, 38.5% (1.1)
Zip Code				
Urban	1526, 18.2% (1.1)	122, 1.5% (0.2)	3456, 41.3% (1.7)	3131, 37.4% (1.1)
Rural	321, 11.2% (1.3)	35, 1.2% (0.3)	1431, 49.8% (2.1)	1063, 37.0% (1.7)
School characteristics				
Relative Income				
Higher income schools (<44% ¹ of students receive free/ reduced price lunch)	669, 14.9% (1.4)	72, 1.6% (0.2)	2039, 45.6% (2.2)	1644, 36.7% (1.6)
Lower income schools (≥44% ¹ of students receive free/ reduced price lunch)	1214, 17.4% (1.2)	86, 1.2% (0.2)	2938, 42.3% (1.8)	2610, 37.6% (1.1)
Race/ethnicity				
Lower percentage of non-white students (<43.9% ² of students classified as non-white)	1028, 17.7% (1.2)	56, 1.0% (0.2)	2487, 42.7% (1.7)	2156, 37.1% (1.2)
Higher percentage of non-white students (≥43.9% ² of students classified as non-white)	855, 15.3% (1.3)	102, 1.8% (0.2)	2490, 44.4% (2.2)	2098, 37.4% (1.5)

1 WA State Average of percentage of students receiving free/reduced price lunch.

2 WA State Average of percentage of non-white students.

Figure 5. Percentage of students who utilize different methods to travel from home to school, by grade.



More boys than girls were reported to ride their bike from home to school (1.7% vs. 1.1%; Figure 6). A greater percentage of students who lived in urban areas, compared with students who lived in rural areas, reportedly walked from home to school (18.2% vs. 11.2%), whereas more students in rural areas, compared with urban areas, reportedly rode the school bus (49.8% vs. 41.3%; Figure 7). The percentage of students who rode their bike to or from school was similar among students in rural and urban areas (1.2% vs. 1.5%, respectively).

Figure 6. Percentage of students who utilize different methods to travel from home to school, by sex.

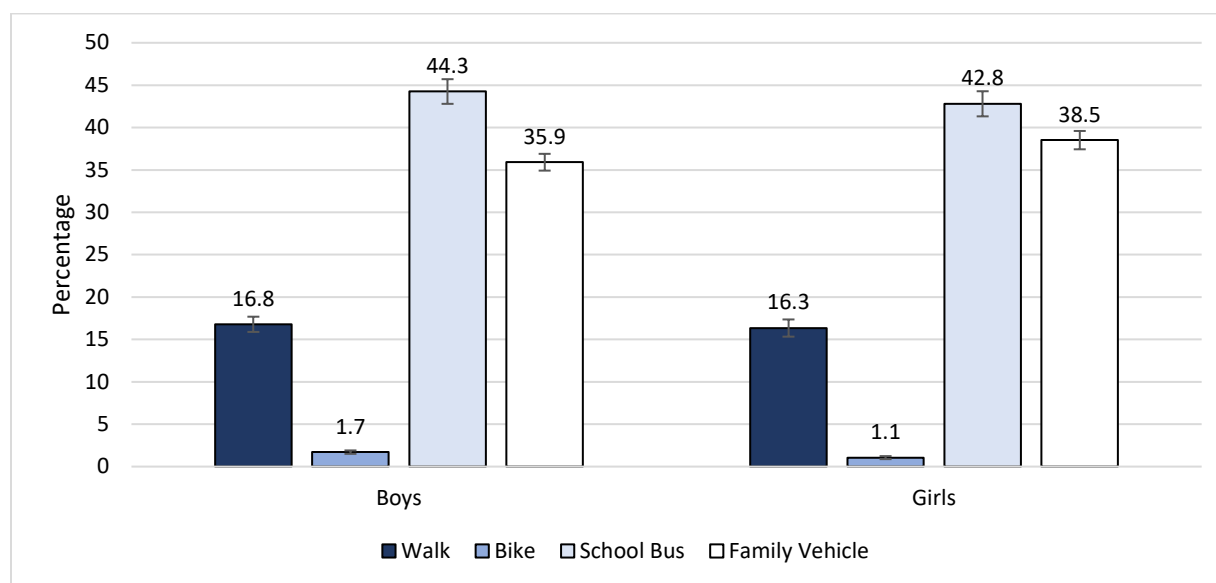
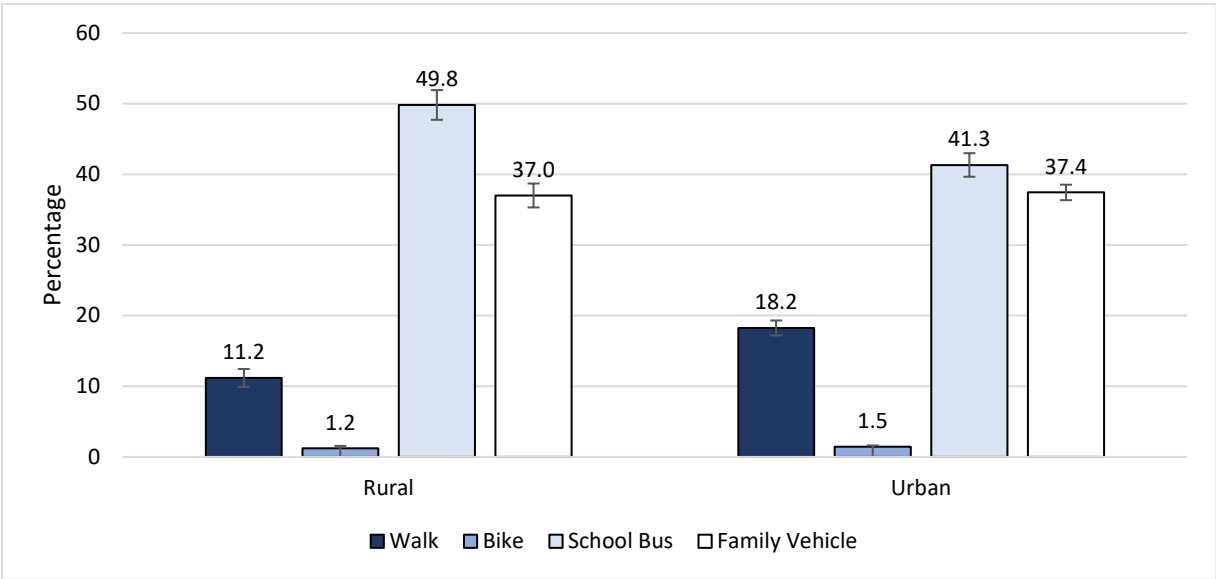
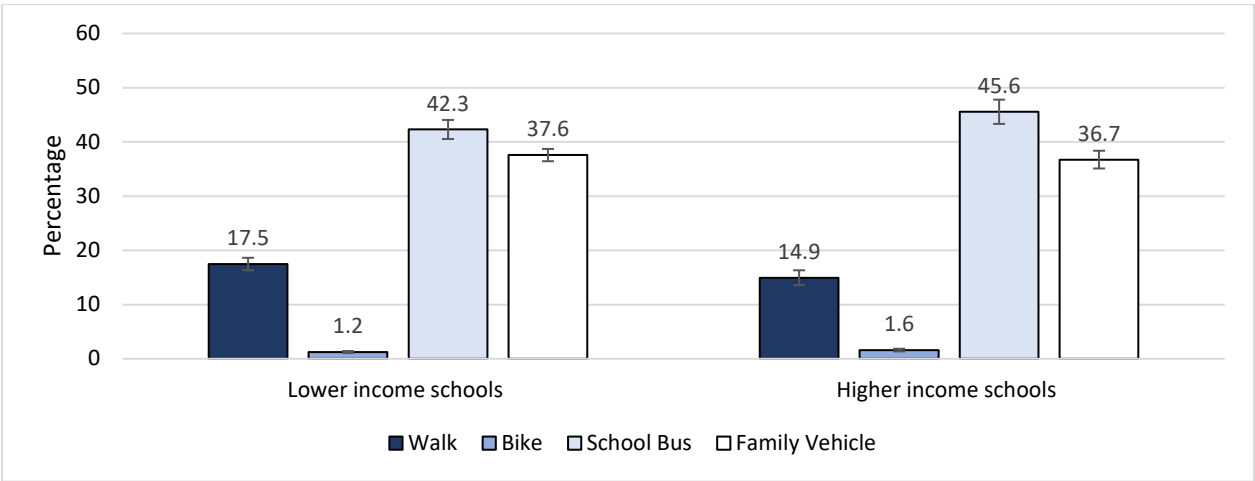


Figure 7. Percentage of students who utilize different methods to travel from home to school, by urban/rural status.



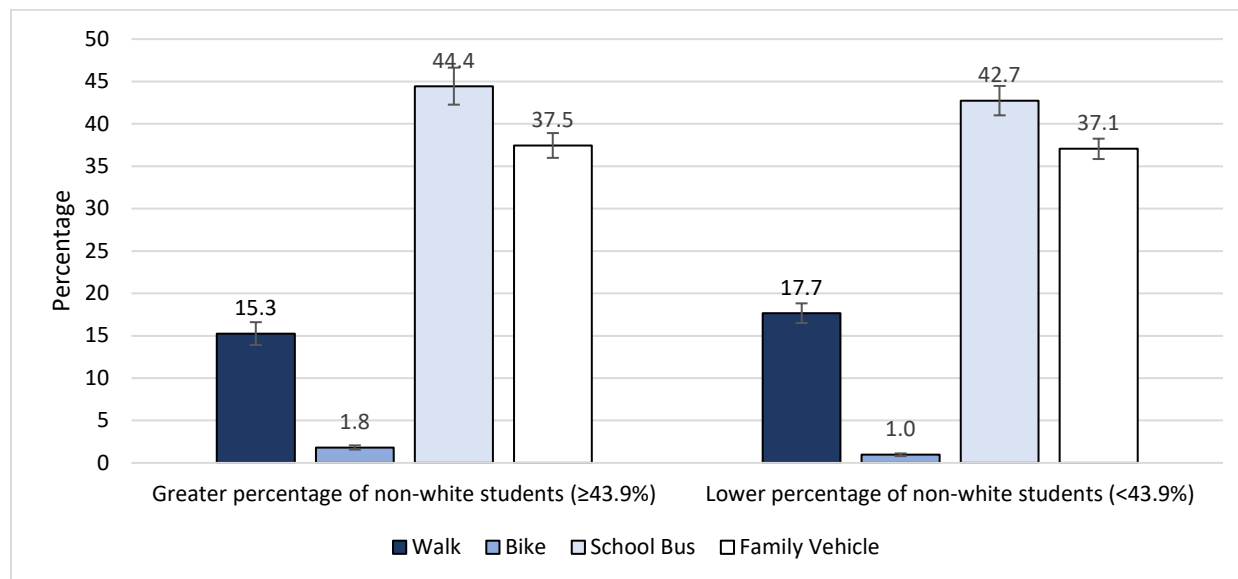
We also note differences in modes of travel according to school characteristics. A greater percentage of students from schools serving lower income students where the free/reduced price lunch percentage was greater than or equal to the state average reportedly walked to school (17.4%) than students in schools where the free/reduced price lunch percentage was below the state average (14.9%; Figure 8). In schools where the percentage of non-white students was greater than or equal to the state average, more students reportedly rode their bike to school compared with students in schools where the percent of non-white students was below the state average (1.8% vs. 1.0%; Figure 9). Students from schools with a higher percentage of non-white students were less likely to walk to school (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Percentage of students who utilize different methods to travel from home to school, by school’s relative income status¹



1 Higher income schools: <44% of students receive free/reduced price lunch; Lower income schools: ≥44% of students receive free/reduced price lunch. (44% is the state average.)

Figure 9. Percentage of students who utilize different methods to travel from home to school, by school's percentage of non-white students¹.



¹ 43.9% is the state average of percentage of non-white students.

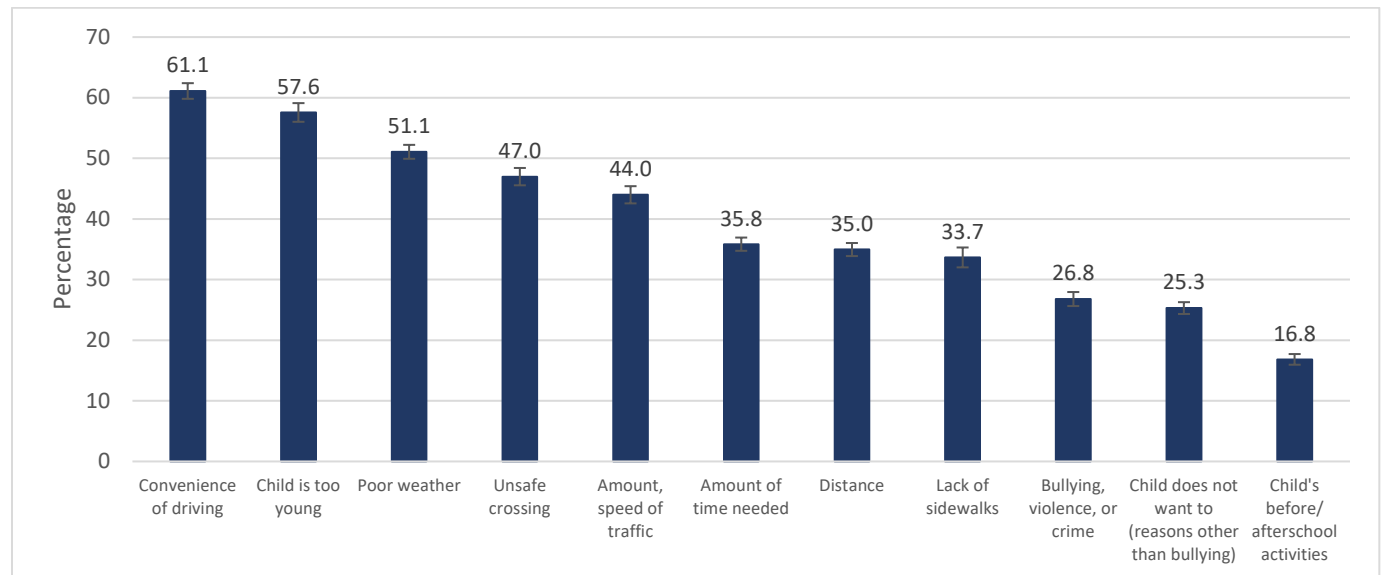
School district comparison of active transportation and bus ridership

We noticed differences in mode of transportation among the different school districts represented by survey respondents. This information is presented in Appendix C and will not be discussed in this overall report.

Factors affecting why children do not walk to or from school, according to parent report

Among respondents who lived within one mile of a child's school, the two top traffic safety-related barriers were unsafe crossings and amount/speed of traffic reported by 47% and 44% of respondents respectively. The number one reason for a child not walking to or from school, according to caregiver response, was the convenience of driving, reported by 61.1% of respondents (Figure 10). About 27% of respondents identified that bullying, violence or crime was a factor affecting why the student did not walk to or from school. (Note: for these questions, respondents were asked to report whether or not each factor was a barrier to their child walking to or from school.)

Figure 10. Reasons* why a child does not walk to or from school, among children who live within one mile of school, according to respondents of the 2016 Washington State Student Travel Survey.



* Note: Respondents were allowed to provide more than one response to this question.

There were differences in the rankings of barriers that parents identified for walking to or from school, according to a child's grade. These are shown in Table 4. Among students in 6th-8th grade (middle school), respondents identify the amount/speed of traffic as being the highest traffic safety-related barrier to walking. For respondents with children in kindergarten – 2nd grade, the top reason preventing their child from walking to or from school was that the child was too young; this was the lowest ranked reason for respondents of children in 6th – 8th grade.

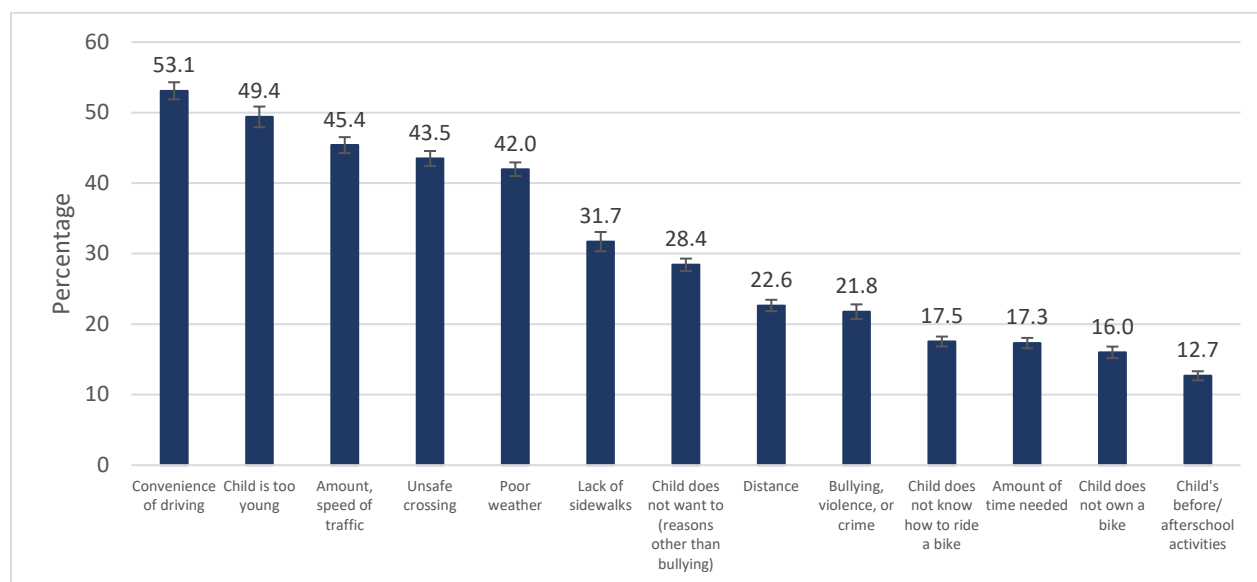
Table 4. Ranking, by grade, of barriers to walking to or from school, among children who live within one mile of school, according to respondents of the 2016 Washington State Student Travel Survey.

	Overall Rank (n, %)	K – 2 nd grade	3 rd – 5 th grade	6 th – 8 th grade
Convenience of driving	1	2	1	1
Child is too young	2	1	2	11
Poor weather	3	3	3	2
Unsafe crossing	4	4	4	4
Amount, speed of traffic	5	5	5	3
Amount of time needed	6	6	6	6
Distance	7	7	7	8
Lack of sidewalks	8	8	8	7
Bullying, crime	9	9	9	9
Child does not want to	10	10	10	5
Child's before/after school activities	11	11	11	10

Factors affecting why children do not bike to or from school, according to parent report

Among respondents who lived within one mile of a child's school, the two top traffic safety-related barriers for biking were amount/speed of traffic and unsafe crossings, reported by 45% and 44% of respondents respectively. The number one reason for a child not biking to or from school, according to caregiver response, was the convenience of driving, reported by 53.1% of respondents (Figure 11). The top five reasons identified for students not biking to or from school among respondents whose child lived within one mile of school were similar to those identified for walking (Tables 4 and 5). The other top responses included that the child was too young (49.4%) and poor weather (42.0%). Almost 22% of respondents identified that bullying, violence or crime was a factor affecting why the student did not bike to or from school. Distance was reported less often as a barrier for biking (22.6%) than for walking (35.6%) to or from school. (Note: for these questions, respondents were asked to report whether or not each factor was a barrier to their child biking to or from school.)

Figure 11. Reasons* why a child does not bike to or from school, among children who live within one mile of school, according to respondents of the 2016 Washington State Student Travel Survey.



* Note: Respondents were allowed to provide more than one response to this question.

There were differences in the rankings of barriers that parents identified for biking to or from school, according to a child's grade. These are shown in Table 6. Amount or speed of traffic was the most often cited reason for not biking to or from school for respondents with students in 3rd–5th grade. For respondents with children in kindergarten–2nd grade, the top reason preventing their child from biking to or from school was that the child was too young; this was the lowest ranked reason for respondents of children in 6th–8th grade.

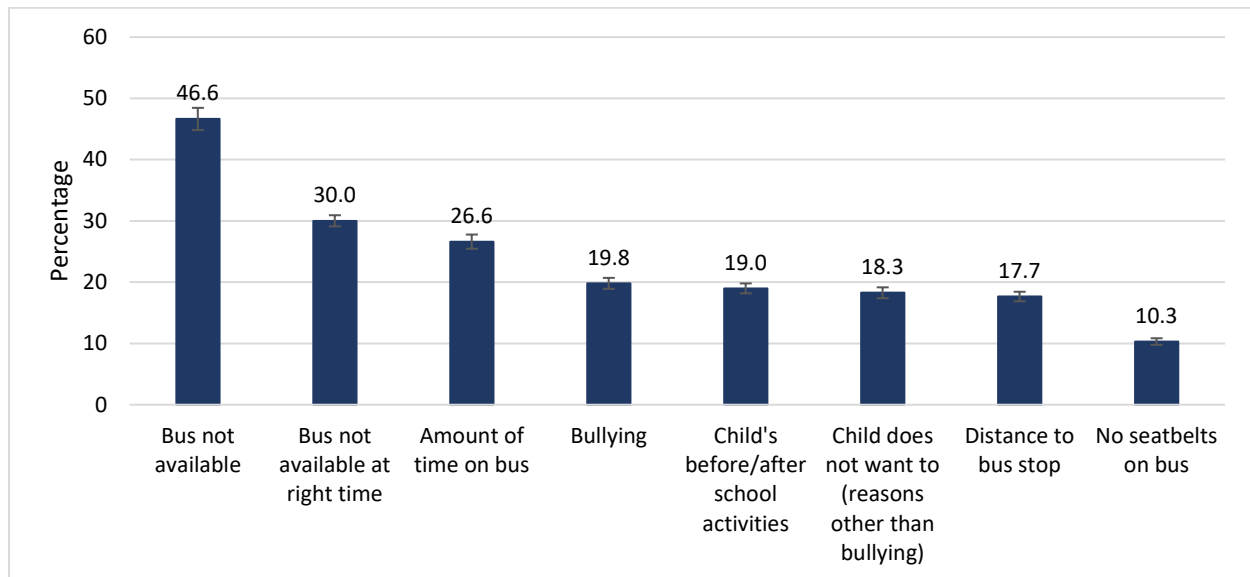
Table 5. Ranking, by grade, of barriers to biking to or from school among children who live within one mile of school, according to respondents of the 2016 Washington State Student Travel Survey.

	Overall Rank	K – 2nd grade	3rd – 5th grade	6th – 8th grade
Convenience of driving	1	3	2	1
Child is too young	2	1	5	12
Amount, speed of traffic	3	2	1	3
Unsafe crossing	4	4	3	4
Poor weather	5	5	4	2
Lack of sidewalks	6	6	6	5
Child does not want to (reasons other than bullying)	7	10	8	6
Distance	8	7	7	8
Bullying, violence	9	11	9	7
Child does not know how to ride a bike	10	9	13	13
Amount of time needed	11	8	10	10
Child does not own a bike	12	12	12	9
Child's before/after school activities	13	13	11	11

Factors affecting why children do not ride the school bus to or from school, according to parent report

Among children who lived one mile or more from school, the top reasons for not riding the school bus to or from school, according to parent or caregiver response, were attributed to bus availability, with 46.6% reporting that the bus was not available, and 30.0% reporting that the bus was not available at the right time (Figure 12). An additional 20% of parents reported the amount of time the child spent on the bus was a barrier to riding the school bus, and 19.8% reported a concern with bullying. These results are similar for each grade group (Table 6) and to those rankings in the 2014 Survey (Table 7). (Note: for these questions, respondents were asked to report whether or not each factor was a barrier to their child riding the school bus to or from school.)

Figure 12. Reasons* why a child does not ride the school bus to school, among children who live more than one mile from school.



* Note: Respondents were allowed to provide more than one response to this question.

Table 6. Ranking, overall and by grade, of barriers to riding the school bus to or from school among children who live one or more miles from school, according to respondents of the 2016 Washington State Student Travel Survey.

	Overall Rank	K – 2 nd grade	3 rd – 5 th grade	6 th – 8 th grade
Bus is not available	1	1	1	1
Bus is not available at right time	2	2	2	2
Amount of time on bus	3	3	3	3
Concern with bullying	4	4	4	6
Child's before/after school activities	5	6	5	4
Child does not want to (reasons other than bullying)	6	7	7	5
Distance to bus stop	7	5	6	7
Bus does not have seatbelts	8	8	8	8

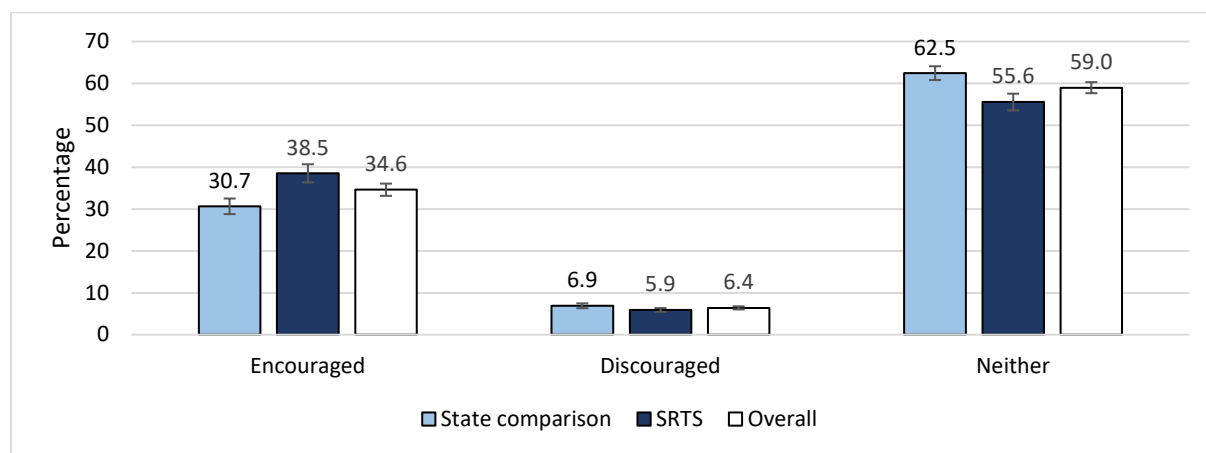
Table 7. Ranking, overall and by grade, of barriers to riding the school bus to or from school among students who live one mile or further from school, in 2014 vs. 2016.

	Overall Rank, 2016	Overall Rank, 2014
Bus is not available	1	1
Bus is not available at right time	2	2
Amount of time on bus	3	3
Concern with bullying	4	6
Child's before/after school activities	5	4
Child does not want to (reasons other than bullying)	6	7
Distance to bus stop	7	5
Bus does not have seatbelts	8	8

Perception that schools support walking or biking to or from school, according to parent report

A higher percentage of respondents with children in schools that had received funding for a Safe Routes to School infrastructure project (SRTS schools) reported that their child's school encouraged walking or biking to or from school, compared with respondents whose child attended the randomly selected state schools (Figure 14). Among respondents with students in SRTS schools, 38.5% reported that their child's school encouraged walking or biking to school. This is in comparison to 30.7% of respondents whose child attended one of the randomly selected state schools. However, the majority of both sets of respondents – SRTS schools and the randomly selected state schools – reported that their child's school neither encouraged nor discouraged walking or biking to school. These results are similar to those found in 2014 (results not shown).

Figure 13. Percentage of respondents who reported their child's school encouraged or discouraged walking or biking to or from school.



Differences in Safe Routes to School schools and other schools

Aside from differences in the perception of parents about schools encouraging walking or biking to or from school, there were no statistically significant differences in responses from SRTS schools vs. other schools. A further analysis of the data related to the effectiveness of the SRTS program is outside the scope of this report. We address recommendations for improving evaluation efforts of the Safe Routes to School Program in Washington State in the Limitations and Recommendations section below.

Discussion

From a state-wide telephone survey of parents we found that in 2016, 18.5% of children in grades K–8 in Washington state utilized active transport (i.e., walking, biking, skateboarding or something similar) to travel from home to school. This includes 17.0% of children who walked to school, and 1.4% of children who biked to school. A similar percentage of children utilized active transport to travel home from school, including 20.0% who walked and 1.3% who biked. The 2016 estimates for walking are higher than those observed through the 2014 survey, as well as national 2014 estimates, which measure 15.2% for walking from home to school and 18.1% for walking from school to home. While estimates for biking

to school were higher in 2016 than observed in 2014, they are relatively the same as national 2014 estimates, which measured 1.9% for biking to or from school.

A recent report from the National Safe Routes to School program found that the percentage of students walking to and from school increased significantly between 2007-08 to 2014, from 11.5% to 15.2% of children walking from home to school, and from 15.2% to 18.4% of children walking from school to home. These national trends represent increases of 32% and 24% in walking to and from school respectively, from 2007–08 to 2014. Although we did not measure trends over time, we expect that Washington State might follow the same trends observed nationally.

When restricted to only those children who lived within one mile of school, a greater percentage of parents reported their child walked or biked (40.1% and 2.5%, respectively) to travel from home to school. It is not surprising that more students who live within one mile of school would utilize active transport; at a relaxed pace it typically takes 20 minutes or less to walk and about 6 minutes to bike a mile. There are many opportunities for increasing walking and biking to or from school, especially for students who live less than one or two miles from school. Safe Routes to Schools programs can help ameliorate environmental and infrastructure problems that are associated with unsafe road crossings, availability of sidewalks, and speed or traffic along routes near schools. School encouragement of parents to view walking and biking to school as a healthy behavior – and to walk or bike along with their children – can help decrease the proportion of children who travel to or from school by family vehicle. However, we observed that 59% of respondents reported that their child’s school neither encouraged nor discouraged walking or biking to or from school, with an additional 6% reporting their child’s school discouraged walking or biking to or from school. These observations are similar to those from 2014. There is therefore considerable opportunity to increase awareness of programs to encourage walking or biking to or from school.

‘Traffic amount or speed’ and ‘unsafe crossings’ remain the top traffic safety barriers parents report for why students do not walk/bike to or from school. Of the attitude and preference responses given, the convenience of driving continues to be the number one reason children do not walk or bike to or from school. Education efforts could serve well to reframe the conversation of student travel and help encourage walking and biking to or from school. Safe Routes to Schools is recognized as an effective intervention for improving community health through the Centers for Disease Control’s HI-5 – Health Impact in 5 Years – Initiative. Washington State is one of the three leading states in the Safe Routes to School program. The success has been achieved through a collaborative effort by Washington State’s Department of Transportation, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Department of Health. Since 2005, Washington State has awarded funds for projects targeting 306 schools across the state.

Other resources available to assist school districts, parents, and communities with increasing the numbers of children walking and biking to school include the “School Walk and Bike Routes: Guide for Planning & Improving Walk and Bike to School Options for Students”. This resource provides information to help develop, maintain, and improve school walk routes, as well as address bicycle and pedestrian safety. The National Center for Safe Routes to School is also an excellent resource, with information on participating in National Walk to School Day, establishing and maintaining a Walking School Bus, and other evidence-based activities.

The most frequently cited method of transportation to or from school for Washington children in 2016 was the school bus (41.8% from home to school and 47.4% from school to home), followed by family vehicle (38.4% from home to school and 30.1% from school to home). This is a similar trend as observed in 2014. The proportion of students in Washington State who rode to school in a bus is higher than national reports, which measured 29.8% in 2014. However, the proportion of students in Washington State who ride to school in a family vehicle is lower than national estimates, which measured 51.5% in 2014.

When restricted to only those respondents who lived within one mile of school, approximately 19% reported their child rode the school bus to school, and 38% responded their child traveled by family vehicle to school. Typically, school districts limit bus services to students who live within one mile of a school where there are adequate walk routes that do not have hazardous conditions.

A greater percentage of students in rural areas, compared with urban areas, reportedly rode the school bus to or from school. This is probably true because of the shorter distance to school in urban areas. Among respondents who lived outside one mile or more from school, the top reasons for not riding the school bus to or from school, according to parent or caregiver response, were attributed to bus availability. This information can help inform school district decisions for school bus programs and to determine if there is a need to better inform parents of available bus services or find ways to make the school bus more available to students who wish to ride.

We noticed differences in the mode of travel to school according to different child and school characteristics. Specifically, students in higher grades were more likely to walk or bike to school, compared with students in kindergarten – 2nd grade. This coincides with the number one barrier to both walking and biking to or from school as identified by respondents whose children were in kindergarten – 2nd grade: that their child was too young to walk or bike to or from school. Among students in 6th – 8th grade (middle school), respondents identify the amount/speed of traffic as being the highest traffic safety-related barrier to walking. Middle schools typically serve a larger number of children and many are sited on higher-speed arterial roads.

A greater percentage of students from lower-income schools than those in higher-income schools reportedly walked to school. This is similar to national observations. These observations can help create more targeted programs for infrastructure improvements and communication materials to reach the populations of greatest interest and help improve student travel for all Washington children. These numbers support the need to maintain Safe Routes to School project selection criteria that prioritize projects targeting schools that serve low-income children.

Limitations and Recommendations

There are several limitations to the survey methodology and results. It utilized a cross-sectional design, and therefore cannot identify causal information or detect differences based on time. While our sample size was robust (n = 11,421) we had non-response issues, as expected with a telephone survey.

In addition, the survey does not provide evaluation results for SRTS projects due to the fact that it lacked a true “control” group. Many of the randomly selected schools, that did not receive SRTS funding, may

have participated in other activities aimed at promoting active transportation to or from school. Also, schools in the SRTS group were not comparable. Their SRTS projects made different improvements, and baseline rates of children walking or biking to school were not the same. To evaluate the SRTS projects a systematic method for collecting and reporting this information through a third party was recommended. This could be facilitated by having participation in this survey as a consideration for SRTS funding. This would take the burden off schools and local agencies to collect and report on this information for the application themselves.

Conclusion

The 2016 Student Travel Survey provides information to help improve student transportation services, inform efforts aimed at increasing active transport to or from school, and overall create a more efficient and cost-effective transportation system. This in turn provides opportunities to improve student health, safety and well-being. Data from the 2016 Student Travel Survey provides important benchmark information about the state's walking, biking and school bus ridership trends.

Higher rates of children riding the school bus in Washington State compared to other parts of the country indicate that our investments in transportation services are well used. The results reveal opportunities to do more to provide better, more efficient transportation options for walking, biking or riding the school bus. There are large numbers of children that live within 1 mile of school who do not use active transportation and others who live further away that could ride the school bus but don't. Parent attitudes suggest that pedestrian crossing improvements and efforts to reduce the speed of traffic near schools would influence their decision to allow their children to walk or bike to school. Reports that school bus services are not available indicate a potential to increase school bus ridership by enhancing communication and/or providing additional services in some areas.

The results of the survey will be shared broadly to support work at the local and state level. School district-specific results will be provided to participating districts to help them better understand travel patterns among their student populations. In partnership with local agencies, they will be able to use these data to apply for funding opportunities – including the Safe Routes to School Program – and demonstrate the need for other student transportation funding opportunities. At a state level this information builds on information gained through the 2014 survey and will help with planning efforts to optimize the distribution of funding for improvements where they will be most efficient and effective.

The challenge is to provide options for the best, most cost efficient transportation system possible while keeping the health and well-being of children in mind. This survey gives direction to overcome the barriers and achieve our goal.

Appendix

A. Letter of Support from OSPI



SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Randy I. Dorn Old Capitol Building · PO BOX 47200 · Olympia, WA 98504-7200 · <http://www.k12.wa.us>

February 10, 2016

School District Superintendents

RE: Upcoming Student Travel Survey

The Washington State Department of Transportation (DOT) and Department of Health (DOH) are developing a survey, funded and supported by the State Legislature, to improve our understanding of how students travel to and from school. The 2016 Student Travel Survey is a follow-up to one conducted in 2014, and is planned for March through May 2016. The survey will ask how students travel to and from school and about barriers to walking, biking, or riding the bus.

The Washington State Department of Health will recruit about 400 schools, including most schools with Safe Routes to School programs, and 200 additional schools selected at random to provide a state comparison sample.

The Department of Health will contact you shortly to notify you which, if any, schools in your district have been selected for participation. Consistent with rules for acquiring directory information, they will be requesting that schools or districts provide a list of phone numbers for the parents or guardians of students in kindergarten through 8th grade. They also will provide you a sample letter that can be sent home to parents explaining the survey and encouraging participation.

The survey design methodology requires that parents opt-out, rather than opt-in, in order to ensure a random and representative sample for the state. We also will be sharing information about the survey with school transportation directors, Parent Teacher Associations, the Washington Association of School Administrators, and with the Association of Washington School Principals. School districts will receive a summary of findings of the survey in winter 2016.

If you would like more information about the Student Travel Survey please contact Charlotte Claybrooke, Department of Transportation, Safe Routes to School Coordinator, Phone 360-705-7302.

We at OSPI are recommending that school districts participate in this important survey. We hope that the results of this evaluation will be informative about student transportation, will help you to plan activities to promote walking and biking, and support your district to apply for future Safe Routes to School funding.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randy Dorn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Randy I. Dorn
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

RD:DN:ks

B. 2016 Student Travel Survey Questions

Washington State Safe Routes to School Survey
Washington State Department of Health
Washington State Department of Transportation
Main Survey Questions

Q1. How far does your child live from school?

- 01 Less than $\frac{1}{4}$ mile
- 02 $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to $< \frac{1}{2}$ mile
- 03 $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to < 1 mile
- 04 1 mile to < 2 miles
- 05 2 miles to < 3 miles
- 06 3 miles to < 4 miles
- 07 4 miles to < 5 miles
- 08 5 or more miles from school
- 97 Don't know
- 99 Refused

Q2. On most school days, how does your child usually get to school?

- 01 Walk
- 02 Bike
- 03 Skateboard, roller skates, roller blades, non-motorized scooter
- 04 School bus
- 05 Family vehicle, including motorcycle (only children in your family)
- 06 Carpool (with children from other families)
- 07 Transit (city bus, ferry, other public transportation)
- 08 Motorized scooter, moped
- 09 Other, specify
- 97 Don't Know
- 99 Refused

Q3. How long does it normally take your child to get to school?

- 01 0-10 minutes
- 02 11-20 minutes
- 03 21-30 minutes
- 04 31-40 minutes
- 05 41-50 minutes
- 06 51-60 minutes
- 07 More than one hour
- 97 Don't know
- 99 Refused

Q4. On most school days, how does your child usually leave school?

- 01 Walk
- 02 Bike
- 03 Skateboard, roller skates, roller blades, non-motorized scooter
- 04 School bus
- 05 Family vehicle, including motorcycle (only children in your family)
- 06 Carpool (with children from other families)
- 07 Transit (city bus, ferry, other public transportation)
- 08 Motorized scooter, moped
- 09 Other, specify
- 97 Don't Know
- 99 Refused

Q5. How long does it normally take your child to get home from school?

- 01 0-10 minutes
- 02 11-20 minutes
- 03 21-30 minutes
- 04 31-40 minutes
- 05 41-50 minutes
- 06 51-60 minutes
- 07 More than one hour
- 97 Don't Know
- 99 Refused

Q6. Which of the following affects why your child does not walk to/from school?

Please respond YES or NO to each of the following factors.

01. Distance between home and school
02. Convenience of driving
03. Amount of time needed to walk
04. Child's before or after school activities.
05. Amount or speed of traffic along route
06. Lack of sidewalks or pathways
07. Bullying, violence or crime
08. Poor weather
09. Child does not want to.
10. Child is too young.
11. Unsafe road crossing
12. Any other reason I didn't mention: _____

Q7. Which of the following affects why your child does not bike to/ from school?

Please respond YES or NO to each of the following factors.

01. Distance between home and school
02. Convenience of driving
03. Amount of time needed to walk
04. Child's before or after school activities.
05. Amount or speed of traffic along route
06. Lack of sidewalks or pathways
07. Bullying, violence or crime
08. Poor weather
09. Child does not want to.
10. Child is too young.
11. Child does not know how to ride bicycle
12. Child does not own a bicycle
13. Unsafe road crossing
14. Any other reason I didn't mention: _____

Q8. Which of the following affects why he or she does not ride the school bus to or from school?

Please respond YES or NO to each of the following factors.

- 01. Bus is not available
- 02. Bus not available at right time
- 03. Amount of time on the bus
- 04. Your child's before or after school activities
- 05. Concern with bullying on the bus
- 06. Your child does not want to ride the bus for reasons other than bullying
- 07. Distance to school bus stop
- 08. Bus doesn't have seat belts
- 09. Any other reason I didn't mention

Q9. In your opinion, has your child's school encouraged or discouraged walking or biking to and from school?

- 01 Encouraged
- 02 Discouraged
- 03 Neither
- 97 Don't know
- 99 Refused

Q10. What is your zip code?

C. Mode of transportation according to school district.

School District	Walk		Bike		School Bus		Family Vehicle	
	Percent	SE	Percent	SE	Percent	SE	Percent	SE
Anacortes	*	*	*	*	41.5	10.4	46.8	3.8
Asotin-Anatone	*	*	*	*	36.9	0.5	53.8	1.0
Auburn	15.4	5.0	*	*	59.9	4.1	22.4	2.7
Bellevue	14.9	2.9	*	*	46.4	9.9	37.3	8.0
Bellingham	18.1	4.7	3.6	0.6	38.4	6.4	38.1	4.9
Bethel	*	*	*	*	63.8	3.7	28.7	2.5
Blaine	10.8	3.3	*	*	62.4	3.1	25.8	0.6
Castle Rock	*	*	*	*	65.7	1.5	26.7	0.4
Central Valley	23.5	6.2	*	*	38.6	9.1	33.9	5.0
Centralia	5.8	1.5	*	*	46.9	3.9	46.9	3.9
Chimacum	*	*	*	*	51.1	2.4	46.7	0.8
Clover Park	12.9	6.7	*	*	56.8	8.0	28.2	4.4
East Valley (Spokane)	6.2	0.1	*	*	59.0	5.6	33.1	4.8
Edmonds	12.2	2.4	*	*	54.1	4.4	32.1	3.0
Inchelium	*	*	*	*	41.7	6.2	36.1	6.7
Kennewick	27.3	9.4	*	*	33.2	10.8	35.8	6.6
Kent	21.8	5.5	*	*	45.5	8.1	30.4	3.4
Lake Washington	23.4	3.9	1.8	0.5	35.0	4.7	38.2	3.4
Longview	22.1	5.8	*	*	27.5	10.7	48.6	6.4
Mead	7.1	1.2	*	*	62.2	8.4	29.1	8.5
Mercer Island	20.5	3.7	*	*	64.3	4.4	9.8	1.0
Moses Lake	*	*	*	*	60.0	2.5	31.1	1.1
Mount Vernon	13.6	4.5	*	*	47.5	1.1	36.2	4.1
North Beach	*	*	*	*	71.8	7.3	25.6	5.8
North Kitsap	9.1	1.9	*	*	53.1	0.3	35.7	1.0
Pasco	8.5	2.8	*	*	61.1	8.3	27.5	4.5
Puyallup	11.7	2.5	*	*	47.7	4.6	38.3	3.1
Quincy	17.3	4.3	*	*	45.5	11.0	37.2	6.9
Seattle	26.7	3.5	2.3	0.5	30.8	4.0	37.0	2.7
Shelton	*	*	*	*	69.8	0.2	24.5	2.3
Shoreline	14.9	1.6	*	*	50.3	5.1	32.6	5.3
South Kitsap	*	*	*	*	64.4	8.1	32.7	6.5
Spokane	29.1	2.5	1.8	0.5	17.8	2.7	49.9	2.6
Stanwood-Camano Island	14.1	5.2	*	*	40.2	12.2	42.4	6.3
Tacoma	21.5	4.7	*	*	20.9	3.6	54.5	5.0
University Place	9.3	1.6	*	*	49.2	3.9	40.2	3.2
Vashon Island	*	*	*	*	67.2	2.9	26.1	1.5
Wahluke	32.2	7.7	*	*	49.0	1.2	18.2	8.0
Walla Walla	11.0	2.8	*	*	36.2	4.1	47.1	2.7
Wenatchee	19.3	6.5	*	*	18.9	6.4	59.4	8.7
Woodland	*	*	*	*	55.6	3.4	36.5	1.9
Yakima	34.5	5.6	*	*	19.0	0.9	43.5	6.7
Zillah	7.9	2.3	*	*	33.6	2.0	57.9	3.0

SE = Standard error

* = data suppressed due to small numbers (i.e., <10 respondents) or unstable estimate. School districts not presented in the table were still part of the larger state sample calculations.